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## CABALLO DE GINEBRA

In Cervantes' *Entremés de la Guarda Cuidadosa* occurs the following passage:

*Soldado*: Pues ven acá, sota-sacristán de Satanás.

*Sacristan*: Pues voy allá, caballo de Ginebra.

*Soldado*: Bueno: sota y caballo; no falta sino el rey para tomar las manos.

In commenting upon this passage, Bonilla y San Martín,<sup>1</sup> after remarking that the sense of *caballo de Ginebra* is obscure, offers two explanations. First, he proposes that *Ginebra* be emended to *Gonela*. Gonnella was the court jester of the Este family, who rode the famous horse which was "only skin and bones," alluded to in the first chapter of *Don Quijote*. Second, he thinks that *de Ginebra* casts an aspersion of heresy, and illustrates his point by two quotations:

Tal fiesta allí se celebra,  
que halla cualquier convidado  
platos de carne y pescado,  
como en viernes de Ginebra

[Ruiz de Alarcón, *La cueva de Salamanca*, II, 1].

Es como Ginebra el gusto:  
sin leyes quiere vivir

[Lope de Vega, *Pobreza no es vileza*, III, 11].

In the later Schevill-Bonilla edition of this play,<sup>2</sup> the earlier note is reprinted with the addition of another allusion to Geneva as a nest of heresy, and also a quotation of two lines from a ballad describing a horseback journey of Doña Ginebra. These gentlemen therefore offer three mutually exclusive explanations: (1) Ginebra = Gonnella; (2) Ginebra = Geneva; (3) Ginebra = Guinevere. As for the first, an emendation should not be made if the reading in the text can be justified, as it undoubtedly can in this instance. The third lacks plausibility until it can be shown that Guinevere possessed a horse famous in song and story. Cervantes twice alludes to

<sup>1</sup> *Entremeses de Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, anotados por Adolfo Bonilla y San Martín*, Madrid, 1916, p. 212. The translators offer no help on this passage.

<sup>2</sup> *Obras completas de Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. Comedias y entremeses*, IV (Madrid, 1918), 206.

Guinevere in *Don Quijote*, but the passages are not relevant to our text. Nor would it be pertinent to mention in this connection Ariosto's heroine, Ginebra, who figures so prominently in the fifth canto of *Orlando Furioso*. The second explanation is closer to the truth, but it elucidates very little. A single meaning for the phrase will not suffice. We are dealing with one of those *equivocos*, the despair of the modern commentator, so common in Spanish writers of the *siglo de oro*. Nevertheless it will not be necessary to refer the word to different etymons.

The dictionaries give the following definitions of *Ginebra*: Geneva, gin, confusion, a game of cards. Writers of the period offer examples of *Ginebra* used in all these senses.

Spaniards of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries viewed Calvin's capital with holy abhorrence. Their feeling toward Geneva resembled our present attitude toward Moscow. Geneva was the center of revolutionary heresy triumphant. It was a city *sin ley* in the double sense of "without law" and "without religion." Its reputation as a center of disorder was gained long before the advent of Calvin. Under Calvin, Geneva was undoubtedly more orderly than it had been under previous régimes; but from the Spanish point of view there could be nothing lawful or praiseworthy in the rule of one who defied the pope. Thus, Vélez de Guevara's Limping Devil, on mischief bent, visits the two towns of Bertolina and Geneva and finds no work to do, "because their inhabitants are of themselves devils" (*El Diablo Cojuelo*, Tranco V). The following passage shows how Geneva typified to the Spanish mind a combination of heresy and confusion:

*Los Dos:*

El Amor y los Celos  
partamos ésta,  
pues son celos y amores  
una Ginebra.

*Vallejo:*

Es verdad que les toca,  
pues se parecen  
en las confusiones  
y en los herejes

[Quiñones de Benavente, *Baile de la casa de Amor*<sup>1</sup>].

<sup>1</sup> *Colección de entremeses, loas, bailes, jácaras y mojigangas, ordenada por Don Emilio Cotarelo y Mori*, II (Madrid, 1911), 475.

This being the feeling with regard to Geneva, the phrase *de Ginebra* readily became an abusive epithet (*apodo*):

*Pedrosa*: Sacristán de Ginebra, poco a poco

[Quiñones de Benavente, *Entremés famoso de la Antojadiza*]<sup>1</sup>

The phrase undoubtedly carried with it an implication of heresy, as Bonilla thinks. It would be doubly insulting when applied to a churchman. While it may be rash to conclude from a single instance that it was an epithet commonly bestowed upon the much-despised sexton, if that be the case, no small part of the humor in the passage under examination lies in the fact that a sexton applies to a soldier an epithet more commonly given to his own class.

But Geneva also means "gin" in both English and Spanish; *de Ginebra*, therefore, meant not merely "heretical" but "drunken." In his well-known *Loa del Caballero del Milagro*, Agustín de Rojas Villandrando says:

Mas sobre todo, señora,  
cautiva el alma en Ginebra,  
[i.e., while I was intoxicated]  
vine a dar, por mi desdicha,  
en las manos de una vieja.<sup>2</sup>

And the same author writes, in his *Loa del cautiverio de la Rochela*:

Y un sacerdote de Baco,  
canónigo de Ginebra,  
le enseñaba el *Gamant ave*  
[can this be *Comment avez?*]  
por amor a la jaqueca.<sup>3</sup>

Quiñones de Benavente, too, tells of a drunken doctor who was a graduate of Geneva:

*Doctor*:

¡ Ah, señores, el tiempo está borracho!  
Si no lo han por enojo, soy Juan Cacho,  
que ya tanto el favor se disimula  
que puede ser doctor cualquiera mula.  
A este lugar insigne hoy he llegado,  
que por Ginebra he sido graduado . . . .<sup>4</sup>

The phrase *caballo de Ginebra*, then, has the double meanings, "heretical horse" and "drunken horse," but the possibilities

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 808.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 380.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 345.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 708.

contained in Cervantes' pun are far from exhausted. There is an evident allusion to card play. *Sota*, of course, means "knave," and the *caballo* or mounted horseman is the face-card next higher, corresponding in value to our queen. To the Soldier's "Come here," the Sacristan replies: "I am going there"; to the Soldier's *de Satandás*, he retorts with the name of a place presumably worse than Satan's abode; and with the *sota* in *sota-sacristán* (under-sacristan) he matches another face-card in the pack. To still further complicate matters, *sota* had the meaning "prostitute," and *caballo* likewise had its obscene connotation. Quevedo in his *Confesión de los mantos*, contrasts *sota* and *caballo* as follows:

A quien amago con sota,  
doy coces con un caballo;  
copas doy a los valientes,  
y espadas a los borrachos.<sup>1</sup>

The allusions to card-play are here self-evident, and Durán sees also an obscene meaning in the passage. It is not necessary to suppose that Cervantes is guilty of obscenity in the passage under discussion, but such may possibly be the case.

If we ask ourselves which of the four *caballos* is meant by *caballo de Ginebra*, it would seem probable that it signified *caballo de copas*. From early times the suit called *copas*, "goblets," had been held to symbolize drunkenness. We find this already in Sánchez de Badajoz:

Los oros, bastos y espadas,  
y copas, cuatro metales,  
son las insignias notadas  
que trae Lucifer pintadas  
per banderas infernales.

Oros para codiciar,  
espadas para reñir,  
copas para embriagar,  
bastos para caminar  
al hospital a pedir: [*Matraca de jugadores*].

In Cervantes' century, card-players were accustomed to invent humorous designations for the various face-cards of the deck. For example, the different *sotas* were named after prominent local

<sup>1</sup> Durán, *Romancero General*, II (Madrid, 1912), 532a, and note.

<sup>2</sup> *Recopilación en metro del bachiller Diego Sánchez de Badajoz*, edited by V. Barrant e y Moreno, Madrid, 1882, p. 33.

prostitutes.<sup>1</sup> These names would vary according to time and place. It is not unlikely, therefore, that the *caballo de copas*, the suit which was identified in Spaniards' minds with drunkenness, was sometimes called the "Genevan horse," or "gin horse." But if this was so, why should the name of a playing-card be applied to an individual as an insult? Nothing was commoner than this procedure. Just as the names of individuals were bestowed upon playing-cards, so the names of playing-cards were given to individuals as abusive epithets. I need only mention that in the *Entremés de los apodos*, that rich collection of terms of abuse, an old doctor is called "king of clubs," and a young man "knave of spades."

The above is offered merely as a hypothesis. It is difficult to recover the slang of another age and easy to see more in a phrase like this than it really contained. We must not forget that there existed also a game named *Ginebra*. I know nothing about this game and the function which the *caballo* played in it. It is doubtful whether there is any allusion to it in the passage in *La Guarda cuidadosa*. Monreal, Rodríguez Marín, and Hazañas de la Rúa, who have written so extensively on *la ciencia de Vilhán*, do not mention the game *Ginebra*, but the following passage would seem to indicate that, like Geneva the city, it was characterized by confusion:

Pues que toda vuestra vida  
es como juego de naipes,  
donde todas son figuras,  
y el mejor, mejor lo hace;  
dejemos a cada uno  
viva en la ley que gustare,  
aunque su vida juzguemos  
a Ginebra semejante  
[*Entremés del hospital de los podridos*].

Notice that the anonymous author of *El hospital de los podridos* couples the word *Ginebra* with an allusion to playing-cards, just as Cervantes does in *La Guarda cuidadosa*. Those who would attribute the first of these two farces to Cervantes are welcome to this mite of evidence.

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<sup>1</sup> Hazañas de la Rúa, *Los rufianes de Cervantes*, Seville, 1906, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Cotarelo, *op. cit.*, I, 98.